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(1) Letter from US President Bush to Prime Minister Fukuda

YOMIURI (Full)
December 8, 2007

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, chief U.S. delegate to the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programs, met on Nov. 7 with the Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director General Kenichiro Sasae at Narita Airport.

Hill handed to Sasae President George W. Bush's letter addressed to Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda. The President in the letter reportedly wrote that the United States and Japan should continue to closely consult and cooperate in realizing a complete nuclear declaration by North Korea and disabling of its nuclear facilities.

Hill revealed his prediction on a list of the North's nuclear programs, which is required to be submitted by the end of the year, saying: "I think North Korea will probably submit a draft at least

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by the end of the year." As to when the U.S. administration decides to delist the North as a state sponsoring terrorism, he stated: "We can't say anything before we see a list of Pyongyang's nuclear programs."

(2) Government to ease conditions for imports of U.S. beef to allow meat from cattle up to 30 months of age (Asahi)

ASAHI (Page 1) (Excerpts)
December 8, 2007

Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura, in a press conference on Dec. 7, referred to the issue of easing the import condition for American beef that now restricts it to meat from cattle no older than 20 months. He formally admitted for the first time that the Japanese government was thinking of advising the Food Safety Commission (FSC) to ease the restriction to allow meat from cattle aged 30 months or less to be imported, if the U.S. will agree.

However, the U.S. has been strongly requesting a complete removal of the age restriction, so prospects are not clear whether an agreement between Japan and the United States can be reached. Moreover, in easing the age restriction on imports, the FSC's decision is regarded as essential, but in a press conference last month, Agricultural Minister Kobayashi said: "The government's policy course of making a decision from a scientific perspective has not changed."

Machimura admitted at the press conference: "Since around this summer, we have been talking with the U.S. about such a policy stance," namely, easing the restriction to allow imports of beef from cattle up to 30 months in age. On the other hand, since the OIE (Office International des Epizooties) or the World Organization for Animal Health in May approved the United States as safe to export beef regardless of age of cattle, "the U.S. has taken a stance that beef imports should be based on international standards and be without restrictions, but Japan is not making such an adjustment," Machimura said. Machimura thus admitted that negotiations between Japan and the U.S. are not going well.

(3) US beef imports: Government proposes easing age restriction to under 30 months

YOMIURI (Top Play) (Full)
December 8, 2007

Following the discovery of a BSE-infected cow in the U.S., the government adopted an import condition that limits beef eligible for exports to cattle 20 months or younger. In this regard, it was revealed yesterday that the GOJ made a proposal to the U.S. for easing the age condition to allow imports of beef from cattle less than 30 months of age. This is the first time any specific content of the talks to ease US beef import conditions has been revealed. With the Japanese side indicating a stance of easing safety standards while the U.S. is requesting a complete end to age restrictions, bilateral talks to discuss Japan's U.S. beef import conditions have entered a new phase.

U.S. Under Secretary of Farm and Foreign Agricultural Service Mark Keenum during a press conference held after the Japan-U.S. sub-cabinet-level economic dialogue on Dec. 6-7 explained, "The Japanese side said that they wanted to consult the Cabinet Office's

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Food Safety Commission (FSC) regarding easing the age limit to less than 30 months."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura during a press conference the same day acknowledged that coordination is now underway to ease the age limit, noting, "We intend to propose basically easing the age limit to less than 30 months to the FSC, but coordination of views has yet to be undertaken."

The Cabinet Office's FSC, which consists of experts, including food researchers, assess the impact of food on human health, based on science. The FSC will compile a report that will become a final conclusion after concrete conditions are set at Japan-U.S. talks.

The Japanese government has thus far insisted on limiting beef eligible for export to cattle aged 20 months or younger. For this reason, all talks, including the summits held since mid-November, to ease U.S. beef import conditions set by Japan have failed. Japan is expected to aim at reaching a settlement on the beef import issue by facilitating talks with "less than 30 months" as a new condition.

Referring to Japan's proposal for easing the age limit to less than 30 months, Keenum indicated his determination to continue to strongly seek a total scrapping of the age condition from Japan, noting, "It is not necessary to take a phased approach."

Tokyo and Washington have been continuing working-level talks by quarantine officials since June with the aim of jointly compiling a report on BSE risk in the U.S. Agriculture Minister Wakabayashi on Dec. 7 told reporters, "If we are to consider the next step, it would be adopting 'less than 30 months' as a new import condition. When the panel issues a report ensuring safety and consumer confidence, we will deal with the issue based on science."

U.S. remains tough; Whether settlement can be reached unclear

(Commentary) The Japanese government is considering adopting a new age limit of less than 30 months for U.S. beef imports. However, the proposal is meeting strong opposition not only from the U.S., which is seeking a total end to the age limit, but also from consumers.

The present import condition that limits beef eligible for export to cattle aged 20 months or younger is a criterion Japan adopted independently, based on the grounds that when it resumed in December 2005 beef imports from the U.S., a 21-month-old BSE-positive cow had been discovered in Japan. Since Japan believes that older cattle have a greater risk of BSE, it has no intention of scrapping the age limit.

South Korea and Mexico set an age limit of less than 30 months. Since more than 90 PERCENT of U.S. beef imported by Japan before it banned such imports in Dec. 2003 was from cattle under 30 months, the Japanese side believes that setting 30 months as the age limit is essentially just as good as scrapping it.

Since the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) in May classified the U.S. as a country with a "controlled risk" of BSE, the U.S. has been calling on importers of U.S. beef to scrap their age restrictions. Commenting on the fact that the Japanese government is considering setting an age limit of less than 30 months, Keenum took a hard-line stance during a press conference on the 7th, saying, "We are dissatisfied." The road to a final

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settlement appears rough-going.

(4) US beef: Gaps in views of concerned government agencies; No coordination of views undertaken before talks with U.S.

YOMIURI (Page 9) (Full)
December 8, 2007

The Japanese government during talks with the U.S. to discuss easing Japan's U.S. beef import conditions proposed "less than 30 months" as the new age restriction in an effort to find a breakthrough in the stalemated issue between the two countries. However, there is a huge gap between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), which aims at an early settlement of an issue that is affecting bilateral relations, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), which is negative about easing import conditions from the viewpoint of food safety. The Japanese side's view is far from unanimous in the face of a strong U.S. request for a total scrapping of import conditions.

MAFF had been determined that if Japan's U.S. beef import conditions became a topic of discussion in the bilateral sub-cabinet-level economic dialogue held on Dec. 6-7, they would make their usual assertion that they would deal with the issue based on science, as one senior ministry official revealed. For this reason, they did not undergo coordination with MOFA before the dialogue, according to the same source.

According to an informed source, officials from MAFF and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) also took part in the economic dialogue. Deputy Foreign Minister Masaharu Kohno reportedly touched on the possibility of Japan easing its U.S. beef import conditions. However, referring to views exchanged at the economic dialogue, MAFF Minister Wakabayashi expressed displeasure to reporters: "The economic dialogue is not a forum for negotiations. I am the point of contact regarding the beef import issue."

Tokyo and Washington will enter full-fledged talks to set specific import conditions once working-level officials, such as quarantine officers, compile a Japan-U.S. joint report. Chances are that the Cabinet Office's Food Safety Commission, which is responsible for reaching a final decision on conditions agreed on, might question the safety of beef from cattle under 30 months old.

(5) "It is not appropriate to take vote in New Year period," says Upper House Defense Committee chairman; Option of taking vote on new antiterrorism legislation before year's end gaining ground in DPJ

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Full)
December 8, 2007

Chairman Toshimi Kitazawa (Democratic Party of Japan) of the House of Councillors Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, now discussing the new antiterrorism special measures bill, told reporters in the Diet building yesterday: "I don't think it is appropriate to take a vote in the New Year period. Deliberation time (about 41 hours) spent in the House of Representatives could be a yardstick." He thus alluded to the possibility of taking a vote in late December when the committee's deliberation time could reach 40 hours on the assumption that the current Diet session is extended. An increase in calls in the DPJ for taking a vote within the year is expected to give a boost to the short extension option now being considered by

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the government and ruling bloc.

Although the current Diet session is scheduled to end on Dec. 15, the government and ruling camp intend to extend it. Kitazawa expressed reluctance about delaying a vote, saying, "We will take a vote without fail. The rule (of determining the Upper House's failure to take a vote within 60 days after receipt of a bill from the Lower House as a rejection of the bill) would put the chamber's future in danger." DPJ Secretary-General Yukio Hatoyama, too, said earlier: "Although we would not hesitate to carry the bill over to next year, a vote would naturally follow once sufficient deliberation time is secured."

Some in the government and ruling bloc are searching for ways to extend the session on a small scale to end within the year rather than a lengthy extension until early next year that might result in a Lower House dissolution. They fear at the same time that the DPJ may put the bill on ice to eventually scrap it.

If the bill is voted down in the Upper House, the ruling camp will not hesitate to override it with a two-thirds majority in the Lower House. In that case, the focus would be on whether the DPJ would submit a censure motion against the prime minister in the Upper House. New Komeito Representative Akihiro Ota indicated in a press conference yesterday that a censure motion against the prime minister would not follow a revote, saying, "The two-thirds system is now widely recognized (by the people)."

(6) Prime minister determined to re-extend Diet session to enact new antiterrorism legislation at all costs; New Komeito supports his decision

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
December 8, 2007

The government and ruling parties have begun coordination for re-extending the current Diet session for a month. This reflects Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's strong resolve to enact the new antiterrorism special measures bill even by using the constitutional rule of regarding the House of Councillors' failure to take a vote as a rejection and the House of Representatives' right to override an Upper House decision. To be prepared for unforeseeable circumstances in the divided Diet, the government and ruling parties also want to convene the next ordinary Diet session as soon as possible in order to secure sufficient deliberation time in the current fiscal year. The next regular Diet session is likely to start soon after the current extraordinary session, an unusual case.

The prime minister has repeatedly underlined the need for an early resumption of the refueling operation, saying it is highly praised by the international community. An LDP executive said yesterday: "The prime minister's resolve to aim for an early resumption of the fueling operation remains firm."

Initially there was some skepticism in the New Komeito about re-extending the Diet session for taking another vote in the Lower House, fearing that this might result in dissolution of the chamber. However, perceiving that the prime minister's determination is solid, New Komeito Representative Akihiro Ota told a press conference yesterday about taking a second vote (in the Lower House): "Unlike in August and September, I have the impression that

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(the people) are supportive of the option to a certain extent." The New Komeito is now leaning toward allowing a second vote.

Some in the ruling bloc also called for re-extending the Diet session for approximately two weeks by obtaining the major opposition DPJ's assurance that a vote will be taken within the year.

Upper House Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Chairman Toshimi Kitazawa of the DPJ said to reporters yesterday about the new antiterrorism legislation: "We will absolutely not use the 60-day rule. We will take a vote when deliberations have progressed. The

bill must not be carried over to next year." He thus alluded to a vote before year's end based on an agreement between the ruling and opposition blocs. Nevertheless, many ruling party members share an Upper House LDP executive's view that what (Kitazawa) said cannot be trusted, for it does not reflect the DPJ's consensus. At work behind the coordination for extending the session for one month until Jan. 15, the deadline for regarding the Upper House's failure to take a vote as a rejection, is a sense of alarm toward the opposition bloc.

In the regular Diet session next year, the government and ruling camp need to secure enough deliberation time for the fiscal 2008 budget, budget-related legislation, and other bills that need to be enacted before the end of fiscal 2007. This can explain why they want to convene the next Diet session early.

Meanwhile, DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa will be visiting China until Dec. 8. DPJ executives are scheduled next week to discuss a response to the Diet in its closing stage to determine the time for taking a vote on the new antiterrorism bill and whether to submit a censure motion against the prime minister.

Some DPJ members are eager to submit a censure motion to bring about a Lower House dissolution for a snap general election by driving the government and ruling parties into a tight corner by shedding light on allegations involving the Defense Ministry. At the same time, there is a view that a censure motion should be put off until next spring or later when the pension issue and the budget bill will take center stage.

(7) Government bogged down over the extent of reduction in the sympathy budget, with the Finance Ministry seeking broad cuts and the Foreign Ministry citing concern about the bilateral relationship with the U.S. (Asahi)

ASAHI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
December 8, 2007

Negotiations to revise Japan's share of the host-nation support (HNS) budget (sympathy budget) that covers expenses for stationing the U.S. forces in Japan are reaching the final stage. Although the Japanese government, citing the country's stringent fiscal straits, has been seeking a reduction in HNS, the U.S. government has objected strongly. The Japanese government itself is not lined up on the issue, with the Finance Ministry insisting on large-scale cuts and the Foreign Ministry expressing concerns about damaging the Japan-US relationship. Since 1978, Japan has borne a burden of over 5 trillion yen in total, so it seems difficult to thrust a scalpel into this structure.

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The sympathy budget consists of two fiscal burdens delineated by a special measures agreement (SMA), one part based on the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and another part that exceeds that framework. Under the existing SMA, 1) the basic salaries of Japanese employees on the U.S. bases are covered (the upper limit (under the master contract) being approximately 23,000 persons; 2) utilities costs at the bases and other facilities; and 3) expenses for training relocations. The total for such expenditures in fiscal 2007 came to 140 billion yen.

The Japanese government at first sought reductions in utilities costs, which came to approximately 25 billion yen. In response, the U.S. strongly advocated maintaining the status quo, citing such reasons as the enormous cost of the Iraq war. The debate continued along diverging lines.

With the hard-line stance of the U.S. not wavering, a noticeable difference in attitudes emerged in the Japanese government. The Finance Ministry continued its insistence on large-scale cuts. In contrast, the Foreign Ministry secretly sounded out the Defense Ministry about withdrawing the request for cuts in utilities. The Defense Minister feared that the Finance Ministry would cut its own budget, so it simply advocated that negotiations continue.

The government, even at the beginning of next week, will consult with responsible officials in relevant ministries, the plan being to firm up a final position, but it seems likely that the strong-minded U.S. may try to steamroller its stance. In the background lies the "debt that Japan owes for withdrawing from the Indian Ocean," as one senior Foreign Ministry official said. Prime Minister Fukuda in his meeting with President Bush in November confirmed, "The Japan-U.S. alliance relation must not be allowed to waver," so large-scale cuts reportedly will be difficult to force on him.

(8) DPJ President Ozawa meets with Chinese President Hu prior to Prime Minister Fukuda's planned visit to China, playing up diplomatic capability

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
December 8, 2007

Takeji Matsuura and So Watanabe, Beijing

For Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) President Ichiro Ozawa, who wants to heighten the possibility of the DPJ taking the helm of government, his meeting on Nov. 7 with Chinese President Hu Jintao was a good opportunity to play up the political presence of the largest opposition party. He seems to have calculated the effects by having the jump on Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's trip to China scheduled for later this year.

At a press conference after his meeting with Hu, Ozawa stated: "The DPJ also has carried out diplomacy and we have built good relations (with China). I hope our efforts will create a certain level of public confidence in our party."

The DPJ has placed emphasis on its relations with China, while criticizing the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for always following the U.S. policy lead. Since its foundation in 1998, successive DPJ presidents, excluding Seiji Maehara, who openly expressed his China-as-a-threat argument, visited Beijing and met with Chinese presidents. Ozawa is motivated to use his China visit

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to boost the mood of political change.

The Chinese president told Ozawa: "We want to change the form of dialogue in line with Japan's situation and circumstances and increase exchanges further." Hu revealed a policy of stepping up the framework of the Japan-China exchange consultative organization, which is an organ to promote exchanges between the DPJ and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). China is considering the possibility of a political change in Japan. The CCP in 2004 set up a similar organ also with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-New Komeito coalition. Beijing is now making preparations for the future Japanese political situation, while keeping a balance with both the ruling and opposition parties.

Mutual consideration was seen in a meeting of the DPJ and CCP held before the Hu-Ozawa meeting. In the meeting, the CCP skipped the issues of history and Taiwan, although it included them in a draft speech exchanged with the DPJ. As if to echo this, the DPJ side did not refer to these issues.

In his speech on Nov. 25 in the city of Otsu, Ozawa noted: "Next year, Taiwan will hold a referendum on its bid to join the United Nations (under the name of Taiwan). If the referendum is adopted in Taiwan, political tensions will grow between the Chinese government and Taiwan." He also repeated this on TV programs.

All the more because the issue is most sensitive for China, Ozawa appears to have expressed consideration for Beijing.

(9) President Hu in meeting with Ozawa praises improvement in bilateral relations

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
December 8, 2007

Tetsuya Eniri, Beijing

Ichiro Ozawa, president of the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), and Chinese President Hu Jintao agreed yesterday in their meeting to strengthen cooperation between their countries in such areas as North Korea's nuclear program, security, the environment, and the economy.

In the meeting, Hu praised improvement in bilateral relations since the inauguration of the former Abe government and stated:

"Japan-China relations have improved and developed in recent years. I think a great deal of exchanges between the governments and parties of the two countries. Strengthening reciprocal relations will be helpful for bilateral cooperation in dealing with such global issues as the environment and energy. Dialogue on security and defense has been pushed forward and the two countries have carried out strong cooperation on the Korean Peninsula and nuclear issues."

The president also emphasized:

"Japan and China are responsible for protecting peace and promoting prosperity and development in Asia and the world. If we cooperate, we will benefit, but if we go against each other, we will lose."

Ozawa then told Hu:

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"Asian countries have different political systems and are at different stages of economic development. Therefore, we won't be able to get prosperity and peace without mutual cooperation. To that effort, Japan-China relations are significant. So we have to build a relationship of trust between our countries."

Referring to his China visit this time around in a press conference after his meeting with Hu, Ozawa stated:

"For Japan, since (relations) with the United States and China are two major pillars, I hope the public will strengthen their trust in the DPJ by seeing that the DPJ has carried out (diplomacy) improving relations with (the two countries). We must hold the reins of government so that we will be able to create equal partnerships with the U.S. and China."

Ozawa and Hu met for the first time since their meeting in July last year. The meeting lasted for about 30 minutes. Attending the meeting were DPJ Deputy President Naoto Kan, Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka, and former Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka, who was visiting Beijing at the request of the Chinese side.

(10) COP13 chairman's proposal places severe numerical target on industrialized countries, but EU welcomes it

NIKKEI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
December 9, 2007

Atsunori Takeshita, Paris

The chairman's draft proposal released on Dec. 8 at the 13th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP13) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change requires industrialized countries to set new targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a new framework beyond the 2012 timeframe set under the Kyoto Protocol. The European Union (EU) has welcomed it, but the draft will inevitably meet objections from Japan and the United States. Difficult negotiations are expected in the ongoing international conference to fight global warming.

Following the announcement of the chairman's draft proposal, a representative from the Japanese government expressed opposition to it in a press conference in Paris, remarking: "Since the proposal includes a numerical target for emissions reductions, we cannot accept it."

Meanwhile, the EU welcomed the draft proposal on Dec. 8. The draft

also obligates industrialized countries to set their respective emissions cut targets. In negotiations to start on Dec. 10, Japan and the U.S. are expected to strongly call for removing the provision for numerical targets, so it remains to be seen whether the provision will be included in the chairman's proposal.

(11) COP13 chairman's draft reflects developing countries' views, expecting their cooperation for post-Kyoto framework

NIKKEI (Page 3) (Full)
December 9, 2007

Atsunori Takeshita, Paris

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The chairman's draft proposal at COP13 urges industrialized countries to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Behind this call is an aim to clarify the responsibility of advanced countries that emitted large quantities of greenhouse gases in the past for causing the ongoing global warming. The consensus is that if advanced countries beef up efforts to reduce emissions on their own initiative, developing countries like China and India, from which more gases are likely to be discharged with their economic growth, will offer cooperation in a post-Kyoto framework.

A senior officer of the French Environment Ministry stated about the chairman's draft proposal on Dec. 8: "Japan and the United States, both of which have opposed setting any numerical targets, will inevitably be placed in a difficult situation." Japan is obligated to cut emissions by 6 PERCENT from 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012 under the Kyoto Protocol. It will be difficult for Japan to meet even the 6 PERCENT target. Under such a situation, if a post-Kyoto pact requires Japan to cut 1990 levels of emissions by 25 PERCENT to 40 PERCENT by the year 2020, more emissions-cut measures will become necessary. Japanese industries will also be urged to hammer out additional measures.

The chairman's draft proposal greatly reflects developing countries' views. But it also specifies a proposal by Japan and the U.S. for setting industry-specific reduction targets to contain global warming.

It will be difficult to reach an agreement at COP13 on a proposal for setting country-specific targets, and a conclusion is likely to be reached at the next round of the conference next year or later. The chairman's proposal is aimed to draw out lively discussion by specifying multiple proposals.

SCHIEFFER